

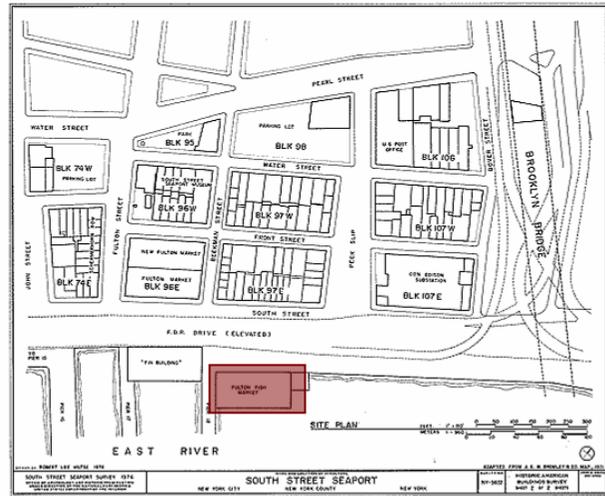


The New Market Building, Fulton Fish Market, September 21, 1939
Courtesy of the NYC Design Commission Archives

Fulton Fish Market: New Market Building

Significance

The South Street Seaport State and National Register Historic District period of significance should be extended to 1954, the year of the construction of the elevated FDR highway, in order to include the New Market Building. The building is already included within the existing physical boundary of the district but is considered a noncontributing element because it was less than 50 years old at the time of the district’s listing. The New Market Building has both architectural and cultural significance and should be considered a contributing element to the National Register district under Criteria A and C. As the last functioning site in the important commercial and shipping hub of the Seaport, its significant role in New York’s maritime history is indisputable. Like most of the other, earlier buildings of the Seaport, the New Market Building has a very straightforward and utilitarian design. Though there is a very modest amount of decorative detail, the building is representative of the architectural style and character of the WPA-era buildings of the late 1930s.



Map of South Street Seaport, 1976, Highlighting New Market Building

Courtesy of the Library of Congress (HABS)

According to market historian Helen Tangires, the Fulton Fish Market was one of the most emblematic public markets in the United States due to its longevity, dominant situation on the East River, and its “place in the world’s food history.”¹ This significance belongs not just to the South Street Seaport Historic District or to Lower Manhattan. Even as the fish market buildings speak to the maritime history of New York City, they also speak “to the world’s environmental history and the future of its waterways.”²

Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century and continuing to this day “burgeoning development and neglect threatened countless maritime relics throughout the city.”³ In large part, much of what remains in the South Street Seaport exists thanks to early preservation efforts spearheaded by citizen advocates and supported by City policy. These efforts resulted in programming in the area that “reclaimed many maritime historic sites and structures as cultural, recreational, and educational resources.”⁴

Since its inception in 1838, the Fulton Fish Market has acted as an anchor for the entire South Street Seaport and its celebrated maritime history. The buildings of the Fulton Street Fish Market - the Tin Building and the New Market Building - have always functioned as links between the South Street Seaport Historic District and the waterfront. The New Market Building is both the last building constructed exclusively for and occupied by this cherished institution, and is thus representative of the final phase of the district's period of significance. To this end, the South Street Seaport Historic District's period of significance should be extended to include this noteworthy contributing element: the Fulton Fish Market's New Market Building.

History of the South Street Seaport

When European colonizers first came to the shores of America, locations for settlement were chosen based upon their relationship to the water. At that time, shipping was the most efficient means of transport for both people and goods. Not only was the waterfront the center of commerce, but it was also the center of the city. "People came to these places to work in ship and lumber yards, on piers and in counting houses. They also came to purchase sails, food, and linen. They came to travel across river and ocean, to greet the newly arrived, and simply to watch the flurry of boats in the harbor."⁵ For eighteenth and nineteenth century New York City, the South Street Seaport was this hub of activity.

The tip of Manhattan Island was the first portion of the city to be developed, at the confluence of the North (a.k.a. Hudson) and East Rivers. "As the city spread northward, fresh and tidal marshes were filled to make space for the growing number of piers, wharves, and other commercial shoreline facilities."⁶ A tidal strait, the East River is favorably sheltered from winter ice floes, and thus better suited to small craft than the Hudson River. "In the first mile or so of the East River towards the Bay were to be found most of the important wharves of the period before the Civil War."⁷

The city's ability to stimulate trade through innovation resulted in the Seaport's peak success from 1815 to 1860. In 1817, South Street's Black Ball Line inaugurated the novel idea of sailing ships according to a schedule. These "packet ships" ran from New York to Liverpool on a fixed date, regardless of weather, full of passengers and cargo or empty. In 1846, shipbuilders along the East River developed the clipper ship configuration, a design that exchanged volume for speed. Along with the booming shipping industry in the Seaport, an entire community developed. The "hotels, rooming houses, taverns, brothels, and seamen's chapels catered to the needs of visiting

crews... It was a transitional zone, a village within the city, and many seamen and sailors who put into port never ventured beyond its confines.”⁸

Earlier in the century, Robert Fulton had pioneered the use of steam with his ship *Clermont*. The shipyards along the East River were forced to adapt to the technology, as the advances of the steam engine eclipsed the efficiency, size and safety of ships powered by wind and sail. The development of steamships had a compound effect on South Street. As technology improved, the steamships grew in size, requiring larger piers and a wider berth. “During the 1880s and 1890s, the increasing size and number of ships, the demand for more plentiful pier space...made the Hudson River the logical place to construct the next generation of piers.”⁹ The East River was too narrow and turbulent to support the massive ocean liners coming into port.

The concentration of shipping activities on the West side was one of several factors that led to the slowdown of South Street Seaport. The construction of the elevated arterial highway in the 1950s “which created a barrier between the waterfront and upland communities; the change from the break bulk to container shipping, which required more upland area; and competition from other ports”¹⁰ were all contributing factors. Additionally, during World War II, American ships flew foreign flags in order to avoid taxation, insurance and labor costs. This practice was not reversed at the close of the war, and as the American merchant fleet diminished, so did wholesale trade at the Seaport. Despite these changes, the thriving Fulton Fish Market remained an anchor to the area throughout these lean years.

Starting in the 1960s, efforts were put into the rejuvenation of the area. The Lower Manhattan Plan of 1966 identified the East River waterfront from the Battery to the Brooklyn Bridge for integrated development as the “East Side Opportunity Area.” Later, the Seaport was included in the Brooklyn Bridge Southeast Renewal Plan of 1969, and by 1970 was determined to be a Special Purpose District by the Board of Estimate. Initially there was little attention paid to potential landmark structures or historic districts. However, grassroots preservation and restoration efforts at the South Street Seaport were launched out of apprehension over these mid-century urban renewal initiatives. Though the City’s planning policy had begun to reflect the special nature of the area, the preservation and development plan guiding much of the restoration of the historic Seaport was not fully realized until the South Street Development Proposal of 1977. At this time the City intended to restore the Seaport to its traditional importance as a vital economic center.¹¹

The South Street Seaport Historic District

Though the Seaport was dilapidated and derelict, the significance of the area to the history of the port of New York and the city as a whole was first recognized by a group of concerned citizens, led by Peter and Norma Sanford. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Peter Sanford commented, “We saw the barren, windswept plazas that were being built downtown, and we knew we were racing the bulldozer.”¹² Inspired by the revitalization of the San Francisco waterfront, the Friends of the South Street Seaport Museum received a charter from the New York State Board of Regents to create the Museum in 1967. The first objective of the organization was to stabilize the area and preserve a collection of historic buildings bounded on the north by the Brooklyn Bridge and the south by Maiden Lane. A majority of these eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings were severely neglected, and some had even been abandoned. The Museum, with the help of the City and several prominent real estate developers, acquired many of these structures in order to save them. Having succeeded in its first goal, the Museum then aimed to creating a sense of living history at the Seaport. “They did this by reintroducing important historic vessels to the area and establishing a maritime museum and research library. The Museum’s purpose was to tell the story of New York and the Seaport through the interpretation of its buildings, streets, ships, and salty history.”¹³

Thanks to the Museum’s efforts, nine buildings of the Schermerhorn Row block were saved and designated as individual New York City landmarks in 1968, a mere three years after the creation of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Soon afterward, this same collection of buildings was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1972, the New York City Planning Commission voted to create the Special South Street Seaport District within the Special Manhattan Landing Development Plan, effectively limiting new construction along the East River to only five stories in an attempt to “assure that the area, with its small historic buildings, will be open to the waterfront, with a high proportion of public spaces and amenities, serving as an urban retreat from the busy activity of lower Manhattan.”¹⁴ In the same year, the National Register accepted the nomination of the South Street Seaport Historic District, bounded by Burling Slip, Water Street, Peck Slip and the East River, including Piers 15 and 16. Five years later the District was extended significantly in all directions, including Piers 17 and 18, and the site of the New Market Building. Also in 1977, New York City’s 11-block South Street Seaport Historic District, bounded by the East River and Fletcher, Pearl and Dover Streets was formed out of the Brooklyn Bridge Southeast Urban Renewal Area. The Historic District, expanded in 1989, closely

following the boundaries of the National Register, but excludes Pier 18 and the site of the New Market Building.

More than thirty years have passed since the South Street Seaport Historic District was listed on the National Register, and it now seems clear that the period of significance for the district should include the New Market Building, built for the Fulton Fish Market in 1939. Like the 1950 Post Office Building on Peck Slip, the New Market Building was considered an “intrusion” at the time of listing. The New Market Building’s significance was likely overlooked because at the time it was less than 50 years old. However, since then, preservationists and historians have developed a greater appreciation of mid-century resources and vernacular market buildings, as evidenced in the 2007 listing of the Gansevoort Market State and National Register Historic District. For these reasons, the New Market Building should be reconsidered.

The 1977 report for the extension of the National Register Historic District does not give an end date to the period of significance for the Seaport. In fact, special attention is paid to the importance of the Fish Market to the area’s overall development and continuity. Located just to the north of the now-combined Piers 17 and 18, outside of the current local New York City Historic District, the New Market Building is a historic resource that deserves recognition. As part of the Fish Market, the New Market Building helped the Seaport retain its maritime authenticity and industry for over 65 years, and is incredibly significant to the area’s history.

The period of significance for the South Street Seaport District should be extended to 1954, the year the FDR viaduct was completed. The construction of the elevated roadway signified the shift in transportation from river to roadway, and perhaps more significantly, it literally separated the market from the surrounding neighborhood. Up until this time, the Fulton Fish Market had been intimately tied to the Seaport. However, after construction of the elevated FDR, the Fish Market and Seaport were severed. As a result, efforts to revitalize the South Street Seaport were begun in the following years.

History of the Fulton Fish Market

Established in 1817, the Fulton Market moved from Peck Slip to Fulton Street in 1822. It was in this general food and supply market that the all of the Seaport’s fish stalls were collected under one roof. By 1838 the Fulton Fish Market opened as a separate entity, in a simple wooden structure fronting South Street. The rear of the shed was built on pilings over the river, so that cargo could be unloaded directly from ship to shore.¹⁵

With the proximity to Long Island via the Fulton Ferry, the slip accommodations, the construction of a new bulkhead in 1850 and the overall water quality, wholesale trade prospered at the Fulton Fish Market and remained largely unchanged for the next 120 years. The buildings themselves, however, have changed many times, progressing from slapdash and temporary to fixed and permanent. In all, four different fish market buildings have called this same stretch of the East River home. The original 1838 shed was replaced in 1848 and then again in 1868. By 1907, the construction of the “Tin Building” was completed where it still stands today. In 1910, a new wing of the market was built northeast of the Tin Building on Pier 18, but this addition only lasted until 1936, when it collapsed into the East River.¹⁶

The Department of Public Markets, Weights and Measures

The Fulton Fish Market was one of several markets whose operation was supervised by the City of New York in the early twentieth century. Prior to the pushcart commissions that were established in 1905 and 1912, there was little regulation of these markets, which were known for corruption, filth, and congestion. Though the pushcart commission had recommended years earlier that each borough have its own wholesale terminal market, the Department of Markets was not formed to operate and supervise the city’s markets until 1917. By 1923, the city had more than fifty open-air markets. The Bronx Terminal Market, the first terminal market as recommended by the pushcart commission, was built in 1929 under the Department of Markets.

Elected Mayor of New York City in 1933, Fiorello La Guardia ushered in an era of reform, initiating a city-wide “cleanup of graft, corruption and other discreditable practices that had



Top: Engraving of the 1868 Fulton Fish Market
Bottom: View of the Fulton Fish Market, 1882
Courtesy of the Library of Congress (HAER)



Fulton Fish Market collapse, 1936
Courtesy of the New York Public Library

flourished under Tammany.”¹⁷ The reform of public markets was one of La Guardia’s primary focuses, and he is particularly remembered for removing pushcarts from the streets of New York City. In support of his comprehensive reforms and new administrative order, La Guardia selected William Fellowes Morgan, Jr. to head the Department of Markets. “The ‘Social Register Commissioner’ came from an old New York family that ran a very successful frozen-fish business.”¹⁸

While in office, Mayor La Guardia abolished the open-air markets, and using federal funds made available from the WPA, the City constructed several indoor markets.¹⁹ During this administration, the city gained the following new market buildings: First Avenue Retail Market; Gansevoort Market; Unit No. 1, Fulton Fish Market; Unit No. 1, Bronx Terminal Market Freight Shed; Thirteenth Avenue Retail Market; and the Essex Street Retail Market.²⁰ Commissioner Morgan was also instructed to “provide running water, rail facilities, and loading platforms”²¹ for the expanded and newly enclosed markets.

By 1935, the Department of Docks had relinquished control of the Fulton Fish Market area to the recently consolidated and renamed Department of Public Markets, Weights and Measures. Thus the Department of Markets gained jurisdiction “over docks selling fish in the wholesale Fulton Fish Market [thereby] giving this Department virtual control of the entire fish industry.”²² Under the new leadership of the Commissioner, the department was set to pursue a course for the improvement of all city markets. As former head of the National Fisheries Association, Commissioner Morgan was a well-established foe of corruption and racketeering and therefore held an acute interest in the standards of integrity at the Fulton Fish Market.²³ Back in 1931, as the president of Brooklyn Bridge Freezing and Storage Company, Morgan had fallen victim to the fish market gangsters. After turning over names, dates and evidence of racketeering to the District Attorney, “in retaliation, one of his warehouses was torched, his trucks were sabotaged, and his business was crippled.”²⁴ Immediately after his appointment to commissioner, he moved to clean house and flush the rackets from the fish market scene.

The battle against the racketeers was particularly difficult in the Fulton Fish Market, where “the activities of a gang which victimized the commission merchants and wholesalers increased the cost of fish to New York housewives by as much as 2 cents a pound” and taking “perhaps \$7,000,000 annually out of New York food budgets.”²⁵ One aim of the department, as outlined by Morgan under the directive of Mayor La Guardia, was to “reduce the cost of food and other products to the New York consumer” through “improved methods of distribution, education and

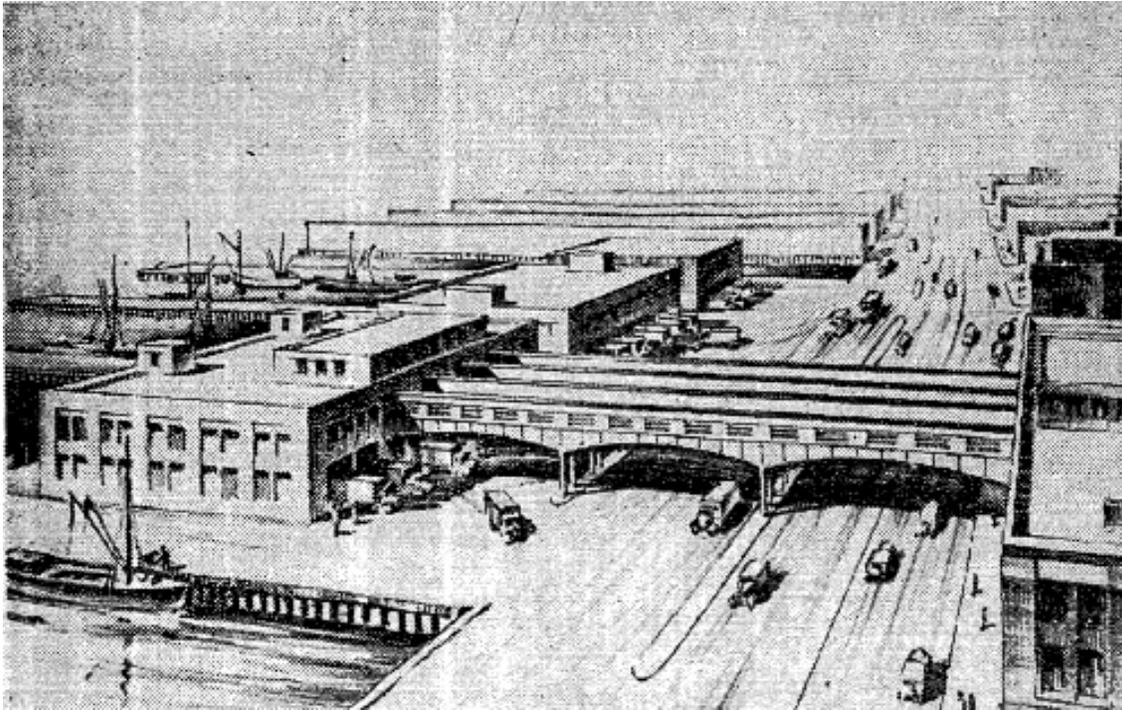
protection.”²⁶ By 1937, the Market Department had “unleashed a crusade against weight-measure frauds” which had been driving up consumer costs.²⁷ By 1939, the LaGuardia administration claimed success, taking responsibility for the demise of the fish industry racket, described as “one of the most vicious...where Socks Lanza and his henchmen levied tribute on every branch of the trade.”²⁸ The success of the reduction of the price of fish was particularly important in the 1930s, when New York City residents were hard hit by the Great Depression.

Sanitation & Modernization

In 1936, the most recent fish market structure on Pier 18 collapsed into the East River. A new building was commissioned for the same site by both Commissioner Morgan and Manhattan Borough President Stanley M. Isaacs. The plan for a new Fulton Fish Market building created the opportunity to rebuild within Commissioner Morgan’s new paradigm.²⁹ The new market and its operation were to be heavily regulated and more squarely under municipal control. Though the market reform campaign under Mayor La Guardia was largely focused on the elimination of the pushcart markets, the overarching goal of improved cleanliness and sanitation drove the market construction agenda of the Commissioner.³⁰

At the time, Commissioner Morgan stated, “The new buildings planned will provide one of the most urgently needed improvements in the city’s entire market system.” Among the improvements he cited was the intent for the buildings to “contain capabilities for freezing and filleting, so that fish ready for the pan may be sold, in line with the modern trend toward prepared food.”³¹ Similarly, designs for the modern facility attempted to address the distinct aroma that contributed to the notoriety of the Fulton Fish Market. From the “smooth, easy-to-clean pavement,” to the plan for composting fish scraps into fertilizer for the greenhouses of the Department of Parks, a clear priority of the new buildings was that “the market’s provocative odor” be diminished.³² The plan went as far as to include a “smell proof partition.”³³

The importance of these modernizing measures cannot be understated. The Department of Markets was even asked to be an exhibitor at the 1939 World's Fair, showing the various stages of travel by food commodities moving from the farm to the consumer. The exhibition was made up of photographs, contemporaneous and historical, accompanied by the following reports entitled: "Markets of Little Old New York," "Father Knickerbocker Eats," "The Food Supply of the City of New York," "Romance of the Pushcart," and "New York City Cools Off."³⁴

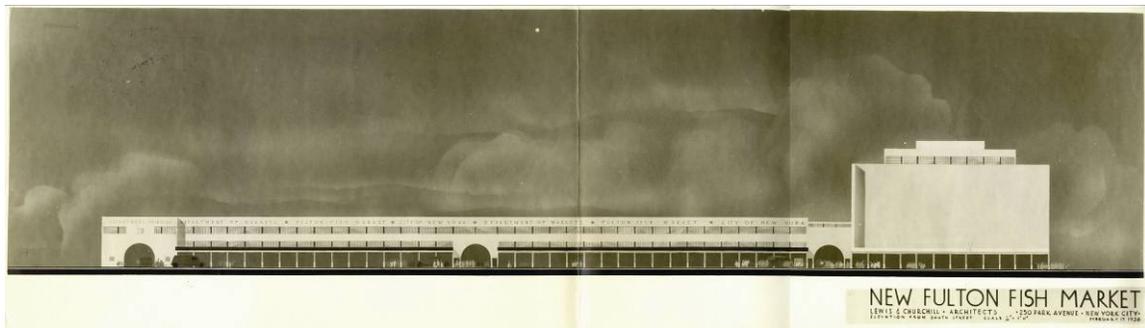


Sketch of New Fulton Fish Market Buildings by Commissioner of Borough Works Walter D. Binger
Courtesy of the New York Times, January 1, 1938

The Design

In 1937, Commissioner of Borough Works Walter D. Binger sketched a design of the proposed Fulton Fish Market.³⁵ The preliminary drawings were confirmed on October 13, 1937, with an estimated cost of \$450,000.³⁶ The rendering outlined a complex of three new structures on the east side of South Street, with four conveyor belt bridges crossing over to the western side of the street. It included a "mechanical conveyor system to lift merchandise from the piers and deposit it on the opposite side of the street without manual handling." The system would be steam-powered by an incinerator that would also run the ice machines and refrigerators, and provide electricity for the entire complex. These innovations were compared to the improvements being made to the city's public beaches by Parks Commissioner Robert Moses.³⁷

Commissioner Binger's 1937 sketch for the market only "indicates the buildings, since their detailed design is not a function of the Borough President's office."³⁸ Albert W. Lewis and John D. Churchill were named the architects for the new Fulton Fish Market complex on South Street between Piers 18 and 19. They were the designers of several other buildings for the Department of Markets, including the Gansevoort, Essex Street, Bronx Terminal, and First Avenue Retail (now the site of the Theater for the New City) Markets. In addition, they designed a two story fire house that still stands at 142 West 31st Street. However, little is known about Lewis and Churchill's partnership, as other buildings they designed together outside of these civic commissions have not been identified. The architect Albert Lewis had a distinguished career by this time, having designed luxurious and innovative apartment buildings with fellow architect Pleasant Pennington in the mid-1920s.³⁹ After his partnership with Lewis ended, John D. Churchill designed several notable private residences, including The Locusts, a Hudson River estate in Staatsburg, New York, commissioned by Helen Huntington Astor Hull.



Lewis & Churchill's Proposed New Fulton Fish Market, February 2, 1938
Courtesy of the NYC Design Commission Archives

The construction contract for the first unit of the New Market Building was awarded to the A.J. Paretta Contracting Company on a bid of \$291,600 in 1938. The proposed buildings were to be constructed on the extended bulkhead at the northern end of the market, at the site of the building that had collapsed into the water. Completed in 1939, the first unit of the three proposed new structures took ten months to build and was described as "the most modern of its kind."⁴⁰ Its design is best characterized as Public Works Administration (PWA) Moderne, "an architectural style that combined elements of Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and the Beaux-Arts style; applied in the design of many large public buildings, civic centers, theaters, and other buildings constructed between 1933 and 1944."⁴¹ A 1938 elevation of the design by Lewis and Churchill shows a long arcade topped by two ribbons of casement windows, further capped by Art Deco

lettering, running the full length of the building. Heralded as a “gleaming white structure,” the first unit proclaimed to “bring a new orderliness and all modern convenience to the familiar market scene.”⁴² The completed first unit was described as “shiny-new and trim beside the older buildings near by.”⁴³ At the 1939 opening of the completed first unit, Mayor La Guardia proclaimed to the assembled crowd, “Some people have an idea that a fish market must necessarily be unclean, unpleasant and unsightly. This is not true today.”⁴⁴

In addition to embracing the modern sanitation movement, the New Market Building was also an early adopter of the prefabrication construction method and the use of asbestos materials for fire-proofing. Particularly in the panels that make up the exterior sheathing, the pre-fabricated and fireproof materials of the building speak to the utility and economy exemplified by industrial



The New Market Building, Completed Unit 1 of the Fulton Fish Market, September 21, 1939

Courtesy of the NYC Design Commission Archives



Dedication of the New Market Building, June 17, 1939

Courtesy of the New York Public Library

buildings of the time. The blueprints of the New Market Building describe several types of asbestos sheathing, including Transite. Historically, the composite cement product Transite was composed of Portland cement reinforced with asbestos fibers. Heralded for its fireproofing abilities, Transite made its building debut in the late 1920s, eventually appearing as the skin of the Hollywood Bowl in 1929.

Industrial buildings in particular benefited from the fireproofing qualities of asbestos-cement.⁴⁵ The use of the pre-fabricated Transite boards and flat asbestos sheathing on the New Market Building reflect the values of both practicality and thrift that were commonly seen in industrial buildings from the New Deal era. Additionally, the completion of Unit No. 1 of the new Fulton Fish Market proposal was lauded for the improved and economical parking facilities, indicating

the transportation switch from boat to truck. The New Market Building was modern in every way, and was a source of pride for the city. In 1938, the Department of Market's Annual Report claimed, "the psychological effect on the industry of a fish market of which the City can be proud is not to be overlooked, to say nothing of its effect on the consumer."⁴⁶

Changing Waterfront

Although the arrival of wholesale fish directly by water had dwindled to only 15 percent by 1939,⁴⁷ with the rest transported by truck or rail, that same year, New York's Fulton Market was declared the "largest fish distribution center of the world" by the Fishing Council, Inc. The construction of the New Market Building at this time was a clear demonstration of the City's valuation of the Fulton Fish Market's significance and its future at the Seaport. The New Market Building represents the last public investment for the sole purpose of industry in South Street. However, despite the success of the Fulton Fish Market, the effects of the Second World War essentially halted the planned expansion of the market. Wartime developments, such as the takeover of the Wallabout Market by the Navy Department in 1941, contributed to the weakening of the earlier excitement for the continued enlargement of the Fulton Fish Market. In the 1940 Annual Report from the Department of Markets, Commissioner Morgan noted, "Unfortunately, the picture which I painted in my 1939 Report on the future of this market, and particularly Unit No. 2, turned out to be over-optimistic. At the present writing, this second unit is completely stalled and it is impossible for me to say if it ever will be erected."⁴⁸ Although it remained unfinished, the construction and financing of the New Market Building by the Department of Markets of the City of New York, with additional federal assistance, represented the type of project that was one of the most celebrated results of the New Deal. With the construction of the New Market Building came the government's promise to secure the survival of the Fulton Fish Market.⁴⁹

As the automobile grew in popularity throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the City of New York began to address the need to provide express routes for vehicles traveling north-south along heavily congested roads. As early as 1922 the Manhattan Borough President was calling for the construction of "two great waterfront highways...one along the Hudson River and the other along the East and Harlem rivers."⁵⁰ In the 1929 plan, *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*, the idea for the Manhattan loop was prominently proposed by the Regional Plan Association. A scenic roadway, the East River Drive was originally designed to mimic the successful Victoria Embankment along the Thames in London.⁵¹ The planned highway loop was

Fulton Fish Market: New Market Building

constructed over many decades and finally impacted the Seaport in 1954, with the completion of the elevated South Street viaduct under the direction of Robert Moses.⁵² The elevated highway, now known as the FDR Drive, promised to alleviate congestion in the area by separating conflicting uses. In 1949, the *New York Times* described the project as follows:

*One benefit of the elevated highway...will be to separate waterfront commercial traffic from through traffic, since the street below the viaduct will be used largely for servicing piers and to provide parking for local traffic.*⁵³

*One need only drive past the Fulton Fish Market during operating hours to see what a bottleneck is created by mixing waterfront operations with through traffic...when we consider that 800,000 persons earn their livelihood by working on the waterfront, we can see that virtually all improvements that make life easier for them are bound to benefit all New York.*⁵⁴



New Market Building with new FDR Drive, c. 1960s

Courtesy of the Library of Congress (HAER)



New Market Building with truck, 1963

Courtesy of the Library of Congress (HAER)

However, what may have been intended to improve the conditions of the Fulton Street Fish Market, actually brought about the beginning of the area's commercial decline. The most significant consequence of the project was the physical separation that resulted, dividing the functional fish market from the surrounding neighborhood, and moreover, the rest of the city. This disconnection was an early concern for the waterfront operators. Even after the construction of the foundation pillars had begun, it was reported that the tenants of Fulton Fish Market, "feeling that the new elevated roadway of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive opposite the market would hurt their business, were contemplating court action to prevent its construction."⁵⁵

Not long after the completion of the elevated FDR Drive, the benefits of keeping the Fulton Fish Market in the Seaport were questioned. As early as 1958, recommendations calling for the Fulton

Fish Market to move to the Bronx, “leaving the waterfront area free for redevelopment,”⁵⁶ were formalized. By this time, only six to seven percent of fish were delivered to the market by water.⁵⁷ Twenty years later, less than one percent of fish arrived by boat,⁵⁸ “having been superseded by refrigerated trucks as the principal means of delivery. The market continued to provide fresh fish from all over the continent and overseas to restaurants, hotels, and retail stores around the New York metropolitan area.”⁵⁹

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the Fulton Fish Market continued to operate out of the New Market Building and its adjacent properties in the Seaport, though the rumbling demand for the market’s relocation to the Bronx persisted. In 1995, the Market’s Tin Building was heavily damaged by a devastating fire, amidst accusations of organized crime and political pressures. At this time, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani heavily angled for the Bronx relocation plan. Giuliani had spent many years fighting for the improvement of the market, and the eradication of Mafia influences and abuses, when he was the United States Attorney for the Southern District.⁶⁰ As Mayor, he continued these efforts, ultimately succeeding in solidifying the deal to move the Fulton Fish Market out of the Seaport.

After nearly forty years of discussion, the Fulton Fish Market finally moved from the South Street Seaport to a new 400,000 square foot facility at Hunts Point in the Bronx in 2005. With the official closure of the fish market operations in lower Manhattan came one of the last working areas of New York’s first port along the East River came to an end.

Conclusion

The New Market Building has both architectural and cultural significance as the last functioning site of the important commercial and shipping hub at South Street Seaport. The period of significance for both the State and National Register Historic Districts should be extended to include the final home of the Fulton Fish Market at the Seaport. The historic New Market Building is both the last building constructed exclusively for and occupied by this cherished institution in Lower Manhattan, and is thus representative of the final phase of the district’s period of significance. Its innovative modern design only adds to its importance. As such, it is worthy of being considered a contributing element within the State and National South Street Seaport Historic Districts.

Fulton Fish Market: New Market Building



Full view of the façade of the New Market Building, 1940
(Before Pier 19 northern entrance was removed)

Courtesy of the New York Public Library



Aerial view of the New Market Building, 1981

Courtesy of the Library of Congress (HAER)



Rear view of the New Market Building, 1981

Courtesy of the Library of Congress (HAER)



Rear view of the New Market Building, September 21, 1939

Courtesy of the NYC Design Commission Archives

Fulton Fish Market: New Market Building

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